STYLE: THE VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

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Many of the terms used in the study of language are 'loaded', in that they have a number of different, sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory and controversial senses, both at popular and scholarly levels. The word STYLE is a particularly good example of the kind of confusion that can arise. The multiplicity of meanings which surround this concept – or, perhaps set of concepts – testifies to its importance in the history of English language studies, and indicates the magnitude of the problem facing any student of the subject. On the one hand, there are highly technical definitions of style such as 'the style of a text is the aggregate of the contextual probabilities of its linguistic terms' (Enkvist); on the other hand, there is the loosely metaphorical, aphoristic definition of style as 'the man himself' (Buffon). Style has been compared to thought, soul, expressiveness, emotions, existence, choice, personality, good manners, fine clothing . . . and much more. How, one might well ask, is it possible to sort out such a semantic tangle? For sorting out there must be, if there is to be any clear discussion of this undeniably fundamental aspect of people's use of language.

One useful way into the tangle is to look at the most important senses in which the word STYLE is used at the present time, and see if there is any common denominator, or dominant use. There may be no single answer to the question, What is style?, but it should at least be possible to distinguish the main strands of meaning which would underlie any such answer.

The first, and possibly the most widespread use, is to take STYLE as referring to the distinctive characteristics of some SINGLE author's use of language – as when we talk of 'Wordsworth's style', or make a comment about 'the style of the mature Shakespeare'. There are a number of different areas of application for this interpretation: for example, we may want to clarify some comparative question (as when comparing the 'styles' of two poets in a given

tradition), or we may be concerned with the study of some single author as an end in itself, or again we might be engaged in stylistic detection work – 'linguistic forensics', as it is sometimes half-seriously called – as with the investigations into the 'style' of the Pauline epistles, to see whether one man wrote them all. But in each of these applications, the primary task is the same: to pick out from the totality of the language that an author has used those features which would be generally agreed as belonging to him, identifying him as an individual against the backcloth of the rest of the language-using world. And it is these idiosyncratic linguistic markers which are referred to by this first use of the term 'style'. If we beware of the metaphor, 'style is the man' is an appropriate summary of the focus of this view.

A second, and closely related use, is to talk about 'style' in a collective sense, referring to GROUPS of literary figures, as when referring to the 'style' of Augustan poetry, or generalizing about the style associated with one particular genre of drama as opposed to another. This is a more general sense, obviously, but it is to be noted that the procedure for arriving at any conclusions in this area is precisely the same as in the study of individual authors: distinctive linguistic features have still to be identified and described – only this time the use of these features is shared by a number of people, and are not idiosyncratic in the narrow sense of the preceding paragraph.

These two senses are the most common in any discussion about literature, in view of the emphasis in literary criticism on defining the individuality of authors and tracing the development of genres; but in terms of the study of the English language as a whole, it should be stressed that these senses are extremely narrow. They are restricted largely to literary English, and to the written form of the language. But we can – and do – equally well apply the term STYLE to spoken English, whether literary or not, and to written English which has nothing to do with literature at all; and it is this more general use which provides us with a third sense. For example, when we refer (usually in a pejorative tone of voice) to the 'style' of Civil Service prose, or to 'business-letter style', or to the 'formal style' in which sermons or proclamations are given – or even to the 'style' of newspaper and television advertisements – we are referring to an awareness of certain features of English sounds and spellings, grammar and vocabulary, which characterize in a distinctive way these particular uses. And comparably familiar examples could be cited of people referring to the style of individuals, as well as of groups – 'I do like John's lecturing style, don't you?'

In the light of these examples, the term STYLE can be seen to be applicable, in principle, to a great deal of language use other than literature; and on the basis of this we might well generalize and say that style seems to be a concept which is applicable to the language as a whole. The word 'distinctive' has occurred a number of times already in this chapter. If one of the bases of style is linguistic distinctiveness of some kind, then it is very difficult – probably impossible – to think up cases of uses of English in which there is no distinctiveness whatsoever. Even the most ordinary kinds of conversation have the distinctive feature of being 'most ordinary'. Non-literary uses of language must not be decried simply because they are non-literary. To refer to such uses as 'style-less' is to beg the whole question as to what style consists of, and to ignore a highly important perspective for literary study. Without an 'ordinary' style, or set of styles, which we are all familiar with and use, it is doubtful whether we would ever appreciate an extraordinary style, as in literary linguistic originality. This is a point I shall return to later.

Other senses of the term STYLE may be found, but they take us into a quite different dimension. These are mainly variants of a sense of style as a 'quality' of expression. When we talk about someone or something displaying 'style', we are making an intuitive judgment about a (usually indefinable) overall impression – as when Mr X is said to 'have style', whereas Mr Y has not. This is very near to the sense of 'style' as 'powers of lucid exposition or self-expression': Mr Z 'has no sense of style at all', we might say. Then there is a wholly evaluative sense, as when we talk of a style as 'pretty', 'affected', 'endearing', 'lively', and the like. These uses are very different from those described in previous paragraphs, as what we are doing here is making value judgements of various kinds about a particular use of language, passing an opinion about the effect a use of language has had. The difference between the phrases 'Shakespeare's style' and 'affected style', essentially, is that the first is a descriptive statement, referring to certain features of the English language which could presumably be pointed out and agreed upon in a reasonably objective way; the second is an evaluative statement, where a subjective judgement is passed about some aspect of a use of language, and where we are told more about the state of mind of the language critic than about the linguistic characteristics of the author being assessed. Any critical task will involve both elements, descriptive and evaluative, in varying degrees, corresponding to WHAT we respond to and HOW we respond to it.

What must be emphasized is the importance of placing our evaluative decisions in a thoroughly descriptive context: value judgments with no 'objective correlative' to support them may give us a great deal of personal pleasure, but they do not provide anything of permanent critical value. We can only resolve a debate as to the merits or demerits of someone's style if the parties in the debate are first and foremost objectively aware of the relevant characteristics of the language they are discussing. The descriptive, identifying task is quite primary, as it provides the basis for the response which any two critics might be arguing about. Why does X think that line effective, whereas Y does not? The descriptive analysis of a piece of language (I shall call this, whether written or spoken, a text) is in no sense a replacement for a sensitive response to that language, as some critics of a linguistic approach to literature have implied – how could it be? It is simply an invaluable preliminary which is likely to promote clear thinking. What such a descriptive analysis might involve I shall outline below.

When such matters are considered, it becomes very clear that there is unlikely to be a single, pithy answer to the question 'What is style'. And perhaps therefore a more constructive question might be: 'What is there in language that makes us want to talk about "style", in any of its senses, at all?' This approach can be revealing: not only does it display the complexity of the concept of style very clearly; it also integrates this concept with that of 'language' as a whole, and thus produces a more general characterization than any of those so far reviewed. The approach is, briefly, to see 'style' in the context of the socially-conditioned VARIETIES a language may be shown to possess – and this is the reason for the title of this chapter.

The idea that the English language can be – indeed, HAS to be – seen in terms of varieties is one of the themes underlying the first chapter of this volume. The phrase 'THE English language' is itself highly misleading, for there is no such animal. If we look at the use of English in all parts of the world expecting to find identical sounds, spellings, grammar and vocabulary on all occasions, then we are in for a rude shock. There is a great deal in common between 'American' and 'British' English, for instance – to take one example that regularly rears its head in the letter-columns of the press – but people are much more aware of the fact that there are differences. The English language is not a single, homogeneous, stable entity: it is a complex mixture of varying structures. The unfortunate thing is that so many people look upon this as an unsatisfactory state of affairs, and try to correct it. The English-

speaking world is full of people who want to make everyone else speak as they do, or as Shakespeare did. It is a pity that the fact and fundamental role of variety in the English language cannot be accepted for what it is – an inevitable product of language development.

What, then, are these varieties? The kind of variation which people are most readily aware of usually goes under the heading of REGIONAL DIALECT. It is not difficult to cite examples of people who speak or write differently depending on where they are from. This is one of the most well-studied aspects of language variety. The major rural dialects of Great Britain have all been studied in some detail, at least from the phonetic point of view, as have many of the dialects of the United States. Urban dialects – such as those of London, Liverpool, Brooklyn, and Sydney – have on the whole been less intensively studied, but their distinctiveness is as marked as that of any rural area. Take, for instance, the language of currency heard in parts of Liverpool a few years ago: *og* or *meg* (halfpenny), *two meg* (penny), *joey* (threepence), *tiddler* (silver threepenny piece), *dodger* (eight-sided threepenny piece), *sprowser* (sixpenny piece), *ocker* (shilling piece), and so on. Terms such as *kecks* (trousers), *jigger* (back alley), *ozzy* (hospital) and *sarneys* (sandwiches); phrases such as *good skin* (nice chap), *to get a cob on* (to get into a bad mood) and *that's the gear* (that's fine); sentences such as *don't youse butt in with the men* (don't interfere with what we're doing) and *I'll put a lip on you* (I'll hit you in the mouth): all these illustrate clearly the kind of language variation which can only be explained in terms of geographical place of origin.

Three points should be noted in connection with regional dialects. The first is that this kind of variation is usually associated with variation in the SPOKEN form of the language. The existence of a standardized, written form of English, which all people born into an English-speaking community are taught as soon as they begin to write, means that modern dialects get written down only by their introduction into a novel or a poem for a particular characterization or effect. The speech of the gamekeeper in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, or that of many of the characters of Dickens, or of the 'regional' novelists such as Joyce, indicates this point abundantly – but even here, only the vaguest approximation to the original pronunciation is made. (After all, if we tried to indicate this pronunciation with any degree of accuracy, it would mean devising some form of phonetic transcription, and this would make the text impossible to read without training.) In non-literary contexts, regional dialect forms

are not common, though they are sometimes used in informal contexts, and there are a few predictable examples, such as the differing spellings of certain words between British and American English.

Secondly, despite the association of regional variation with speech, DIALECT is a term which should not be identified with ACCENT. The 'regional accent' of a person refers simply to pronunciation; 'dialect', on the other hand, refers to the totality of regional linguistic characteristics – idiosyncrasies of grammar and vocabulary as well as pronunciation. An accent is usually the most noticeable feature of a dialect. Whenever comedians wish to make a joke using dialect differences, they invariably get the effect they want by simply 'putting on' a new accent, and not bothering to introduce any grammatical or other features into their speech – but in many ways an accent is the most superficial feature also. Changes in syntax and vocabulary are much more relevant for defining the differences between two dialects than are variations in pronunciation.

Thirdly, we must remember that dialects are not just local matters. My only illustrations so far have been from the dialects of one country; but far more important in a way are the dialects of English which operate on an international, as opposed to an intranational scale. Whatever differences exist between the regional dialects of England, they have all a great deal in common when compared with those of, say, the West Indies or the United States. The term 'dialects of English' MUST be allowed to include these areas, whose importance will undoubtedly increase as regional forms of literature develop.

But regional place of origin is by no means the only kind of linguistic variation in a language. Just as important is the variable of SOCIAL place of origin – where we come from in terms of a position on a social scale of some kind. The social background of individuals has a powerful and long-lasting effect on the kind of language they use, and there are certain general linguistic markers of class which occur regardless of the particular region to which they may belong. For example, distinctions can often be pointed out in terms of the choices we make in the use of words referring to particular concepts – such as how we address people or say farewell to them, or how we refer to various meals, relations, or the toilet. Terms like *mate* and *old man* have clear social restrictions in British English. Again, the use of 'Received Pronunciation' normally implies a degree of education which need not be present for any of the other accents

used in Britain. 'Class dialects', as they might be called, exist. They are not linguistically as clearly definable as are regional dialects because the social correlates are not as readily delimited and defined as regional ones – it is not simply a question of kind and degree of education. Also, English has far fewer indications of position on a social scale than many other languages: in Japanese, for example, there are distinct, 'honorific' forms of words, which overtly recognize class distinction.

Before going on to relate these points to the notion of style, a third variable in English should be referred to, which is very similar to those already outlined, namely, HISTORICAL variation. Our use of English indicates very clearly our historical place of origin, as well as our regional and social background – our place on a time scale of some kind. Whether we like it or not, the younger generations do not use the language in the same way as the older generations do. This affects vocabulary for the most part, but sometimes also grammar and pronunciation. Parents' complaints about the unintelligibility of their children are perfectly familiar. The macrocosmic counterpart to this is of course the phenomenon of language change over the centuries. 'The English language' can hardly be restricted to that of today, but must be allowed to comprise earlier states of the language. Of course the boundary-line between English and the language from which it came is by no means easy to determine (it is a matter of some delicacy as to whether Anglo-Saxon should or should not be included under the heading of 'English'), but there is no doubt that SOME earlier states can be legitimately included, which is the point to be made here. And just as there are different standards or norms for the various regional and class dialects, so there are different norms for the historical 'dialects' also, though this is often forgotten. We cannot talk about Elizabethan English, let us say, in precisely the same terms as Modern English, or vice versa. The person who tries to read a Shakespeare play without caring about the values that pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary had at that time is being just as unrealistic as the person who cries 'Preserve the tongue which Shakespeare spoke!' in present-day discussions about correctness. Shakespearian English, as the English of any other historical period, must be seen in its own terms, bearing in mind the usage of the Elizabethan period of language development, and no other. Without an awareness of linguistic differences between the various periods of English literature, a great deal which is of literary importance can be missed. To take just one example: without an

understanding of the normal personal pronoun system in Elizabethan English (the meanings of the pronouns *thou* and *you*, in particular), our appreciation of Hamlet's remarks to Ophelia (in Act 3 Scene 1), where there is a controlled alternation between the different forms of the second person, is much reduced.

These three types of variation, regional, social, and historical, are very important factors in accounting for the heterogeneity of the English language. There are other factors too, as we shall see shortly; but these three form a group on their own. The basis for this grouping is that they are all relatively permanent, background aspects of any individual's use of English. Most people normally do not talk as if they were from a different area, class or time from the one to which they actually belong. Of course, a few people have the ability to adopt a different dialect for humorous or literary reasons, as we have already seen in the case of regional variation; and there are also cases of people adopting what they believe to be a more 'educated' dialect of English in their quest for social betterment. The case of Eliza Dolittle in *Pygmalion* merely takes to extremes a process which is not uncommon. But these are nonetheless the exceptions: on the whole we do NOT vary our regional, social or historical linguistic norms. They are, essentially, a linguistic background against which we can make ourselves heard. They are, to put it another way, varieties of the language on the largest possible scale.

The relevance of these dialectal features to the study of the phenomenon of style should be clear from this paragraph: they have very much a NEGATIVE role to play. Regional, social, and historical variations in a use of language have to be eliminated before we can get down to some serious study of what we consider to be 'style'. When we talk of 'Coleridge's style', let us say, we are not, in the first instance, thinking of his regional, etc. linguistic background; and people do not in fact generally make use of such phrases as 'the style of the Cockney', 'the style of Elizabethan English', and so on. Dialectal features are uncontrolled, unconscious features of our use of language; many people find it impossible to vary their usage deliberately in these respects. Consequently, if we hope to account for the relatively conscious, controlled use of language which can produce the distinctiveness referred to above, then it must be other elements of language than these which are being manipulated. What other kinds of variation exist in English, therefore, that could account for our awareness of a 'style'?

A few of these other variables have been given detailed study.

Certain aspects of the immediate situation in which language is used have been shown to have a strong influence on the kind of linguistic structures which occur. One of the most important of these is the occupational role that people may be engaged in at the time of speaking or writing: the job they are doing very often carries with it a probability that in normal circumstances certain linguistic structures will be used and others will not be. One way of speaking or writing is felt to be more appropriate to a specific professional activity than another, and the members of a profession tend to conform in their usage to produce a consistent expression. The reasons for this kind of behaviour are sometimes difficult to determine, but its extent is beyond dispute. One very clear example of occupationally-motivated use of language is in the technical vocabulary associated with various fields: scientists, for instance, make use of a range of vocabulary which precisely defines the phenomena they are investigating. This vocabulary does not normally occur outside of a scientific context, and alternative ways of expressing the same ideas do not normally occur within a scientific context – a particular substance may have a quite familiar domestic name, but in the laboratory this name will tend not to be used, because popularity carries with it looseness of meaning, and ultimately ambiguity. Similarly, scientists, when not 'on duty', will not use their technical terminology to refer to everyday objects, for there is no need to introduce such a degree of precision into their language. The comic situation in which a scientist asks his wife at dinner to 'pass the $H_6C_{12}O_6$' is comic precisely because it is an abnormal, unexpected, incongruous choice of vocabulary which has been made.

But it is not only vocabulary which characterizes an 'occupational' use of language – a PROVINCE, as it is sometimes called. The grammar is always important too. In scientific English, there are a number of constructions whose usage is different from other kinds of English. The way the scientist tends to make use of passive voice constructions is a case in point. 'The solution was poured . . .' is generally found in preference to 'I poured the solution . . .'. There are a variety of reasons for this, though probably the most important is the concern to keep the account of the process being described as impersonal as possible. Similarly, legal English, as found in certain documents, displays a highly distinctive and much more complex syntax that can be found elsewhere – unpunctuated sentences that continue for pages are by no means exceptional. And in addition to grammar, the way in which the

language is written down or spoken may be further indications of a specific brand of occupational activity. Probably the most immediately distinctive feature of written advertising language is the way in which different sizes and colours of type are made use of, a flexibility not normally seen in other written forms of the language. And a distinctive method of 'speaking an occupation', so to say, can be seen in the 'tone of voice' which may be adopted: those of the lawyer and clergyman (while speaking in court and preaching respectively) are frequently-quoted examples, and in addition the pronunciations adopted by radio news-readers, political speech-makers, and railway-station announcers could be cited – or indeed that of most people who find themselves speaking in public as part of their professional life. There are criteria for successful and unsuccessful uses of English in all these cases; and if we take the successful uses as a norm, then it can be shown that there are certain linguistic features which have a high probability of occurrence on any occasion when a particular province is used. In this way, it makes sense to talk about the 'style' of a legal document, or a political speech, as we can readily refer to the distinctive features in the pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary which we would associate with these kinds of English, and which would not appear in the same combination elsewhere.

A second situational variable which conditions particular uses of English is the relationship between the participants in any dialogue: this will be an important factor governing the kind of language we choose to use. If two people are, broadly speaking, separated socially (as in the relationships existing between employer and employee, student and teacher, or old and young member of a family), then it is generally the case that different language structures will be used by the two parties, which will reflect this distinction. The socially 'inferior' person will show deference to the 'superior' in various ways, for example by the form of address, or by avoiding the more slangy words and constructions which might be used in informally talking to social equals; and other linguistic correlates can be found to indicate the dominance of the superior. Children are drilled in these conventions from an early age: 'Don't talk like that to the vicar/Mr Jones/your grandfather . . .' is a common exhortation; and the emergence of social linguistic norms of this kind can be seen in the role-playing which all normal children enter into – 'being' daddy, or the grocer, carries with it the linguistic forms of daddyness, or grocerdom, and children show remarkable powers of mimicry and memory in these matters.

There has been relatively little research into this field of inter-personal relationships – where social psychology and linguistics overlap – but certain types of reasonably predictable variation have been shown to exist, e.g. the different degrees of FORMALITY which occur in English. It makes sense to distinguish a FORMAL from an INFORMAL style in English (with further sub-divisions within both). The kind of language we speak or write on formal occasions (such as in an interview, making a speech, or applying for a job) is simply not the same as that used on informal occasions (such as in everyday conversations with our family, or writing to an old friend). This is almost a truism. What is often ignored, however, is that the linguistic features which indicate formality and informality are not just idiosyncratic, but are common to all members of the speech community. The evidence suggests that people tend to be formal in more or less the same linguistic way: they choose certain words more carefully, they avoid other words like the plague, they become more self-conscious over what they believe to be the 'correct' pronunciation of words, and so on. This kind of situationally-conditioned language variation, then, is yet another element contributing to the general distinctiveness of a use of language: a convenient way of referring to it is to call these variations of STATUS.

There are other situational variables which influence the kind of English we choose to use in a given situation. For example, the PURPOSE for which we are using language generally produces a conventional framework or format for our speech or writing, and this can be highly distinctive. The lay-out of a letter, an advertisement, or a legal document, the organization of a lecture or a sports commentary, are all examples of formats which have become to a greater or lesser extent standardized in English. It is not a question of personal choice here: for a commentary or a lecture to be successful, certain principles of 'verbal lay-out' must be followed. Then again, the broad distinction between the spoken and the written medium of the language has its specific linguistic correlates: some words and structures occur solely in speech, others only in writing. Most of the nuances of intonation have to be ignored in the written representation of speech, for example, and most of us are well aware of the social pressures that curtail our freedom to write down 'four-letter words', and the like. And of course the kind of language we use will undoubtedly vary depending on whether we speak with the intention of having our words written down (as in dictation or many kinds of lecturing), or write with the aim of having our words read aloud (as in speech-

construction, news-writing for radio or television, drama, and, sometimes, poetry).

It is not the purpose of this chapter to give a complete breakdown of all the categories of situationally-conditioned language which operate in English, even if this were possible in the present state of the art. The cases so far mentioned should suffice to show the heterogeneity and fluidity of the English language. What needs to be emphasized, however, is that this flexibility of usage affects each of us individually, and it is this which provides a crucial perspective for understanding the question of style. In the course of one day, each of us modulates through a wide range of varieties of English: the various levels of domesticity, professionalism, and so on, through which we pass carry with them changes in the nature of the language we use. The level of formality, to take but a single example, will vary considerably every day, ranging from the intimate level of family conversation (linguistically very marked, through the frequent use of such things as 'pet' nonsense words and slang which only the family understands) to perhaps the artificial formality of a chaired business meeting (with all the linguistic conventions made use of there – proposals, secondings, etc.). What must be made clear – and it is this which distinguishes province, status, and the like from the dialects discussed earlier – is that these distinctive uses of language are all relatively temporary and manipulable in their use. We do not normally continue at the same level of formality, let us say, for a very long period of time. 'Professional' contexts give way to domestic interchange, which in turn may give way to a receptive appraisal of formality differences, as encountered on television. And, associated with this, these kinds of variation in English are all matters which we can to a very great extent control: the concept of choice is much more relevant here than it was with the dialects. In a given situation, which has clear extra-linguistic indices of, say, formality, it is possible to exercise some degree of choice as to whether appropriate, formal language is to be used, or inappropriate, informal language. Of course, most normal people choose the former, only lapsing into the latter when they are very sure of their social ground – as, for instance, to make a joke. But the point is that, in principle, we have both awareness and control over a number of linguistic points along the formality scale, and the question of which one to use is primarily up to us. Similarly, we all know the conventions for letter-writing; but we may choose to ignore them if we so wish. Whether we do so will depend almost entirely on our relationship to the person we are addressing:

obviously, if we are dependent on someone for advancement, we will restrain ourselves, linguistically, and respect the conventions which we know are expected (e.g. the letter will be neatly laid out, punctuation will be 'correct', formulae – such as 'yours faithfully' – will be appropriately used); on the other hand, a letter to a close friend may carry with it all kinds of differences – loose use of punctuation, use of slang, disregard for regular line-spacing, etc. Such a situation does not apply to the use of dialect features of English because, as we have seen, apart from on rare occasions, we have little awareness of and control over their use.

We may summarize this discussion by saying that the English language can be seen as a complex of (to a greater or lesser extent) situationally-conditioned, standardized sets of linguistic variations: these can be referred to as VARIETIES of the language. A variety is therefore a formally definable, conventionalized group use of language which we can intuitively identify with aspects of some non-linguistic context in which it occurs (and which, as linguists, we try to formalize and explicate). An important qualification here is that we are aware of this relationship 'to a greater or lesser extent'. Some uses of English have a very clear and direct intuitive relationship to a social situation (as when the use of *thou* and related forms automatically associates with a religious set of contexts); other uses are much less predictable (as when an official-sounding phrase might have come from one of a number of different types of context). The concept of language variety is simply a descriptive hypothesis to account for these intuitions of formal-functional correspondences in language; and in this sense it covers many of what were above referred to as 'styles'. Phrases such as 'formal style', 'the style of radio news-readers', and so on, are meaningful because it is possible to suggest clear linguistic correlates for these notions.

To say that a particular social situation has a regular association with a particular kind of English is not to say that other kinds of English may not be introduced into that situation. In principle, this is always possible, for after all we can never be ABSOLUTELY certain that people will behave in a maximally predictable way in a given situation. But there are some language-using situations where the possibility of making simultaneous use of a number of varieties of English is relatively normal, in order that a particular linguistic effect be achieved. Literature and humour are the clearest examples of this happening, but cases of 'stylistic juxtaposition' can be found elsewhere too. For example, a political public speaker may intro-

duce quotations from the Bible into the oration to point a particular issue; or a television advertisement may introduce language from a scientific form of English in order to get some of the scientific overtones rubbed off onto the product; or a sermon may introduce television advertising jingles to make an idea strike home more directly. These are reasonably frequently-occurring examples of language from two or more varieties being used in a single situation, and the kinds of juxtaposition which occur are to a certain extent predictable, especially when compared with the essentially unpredictable juxtapositions which are introduced into literature and humour. Many kinds of joke are successful because they introduce incongruity of a stylistic kind into the punch line; and in literature, it is a standard procedure for an author to incorporate into a work snatches or even extended extracts from the non-literary varieties of English. It is difficult to see how this could be otherwise, but some authors go in for stylistic borrowing of this kind much more widely than others: the chiaroscuro of overtones and association in much of James Joyce is to a very great extent explicable in terms of other varieties of (particularly religious) English; and T. S. Eliot is another who constantly makes use of this technique in a very definite way. Moreover, many of the so-called 'revolutions' in the use of poetic language in the history of English literature can ultimately be reduced to attempts to replace the methods of expression associated with one variety of the language by those associated with another: an example would be the introduction of scientific language by the Metaphysical poets, or by some twentieth-century authors, into a poetic context where scientific language had been almost completely absent for some time. Whether the 'language of the age' is or is not the language of poetry is not a matter for discussion here; but it should be noted in passing that this argument will never be resolved until an attempt is made to clarify the notion of 'language of the age' as such – and in order to do this, SOME reference to a theory of language variety is going to be necessary.

So far I have been discussing aspects of language variation which are basically group uses of language. The remaining factor accounting for linguistic heterogeneity stands apart from all these, in that it is concerned with the language habits idiosyncratic to a person, those which distinguish someone from the other members of a group, as opposed to integrating that person linguistically with them. In one sense, of course, linguistic idiosyncrasy is less important than the dimensions of variety outlined above, as we can only be aware of idiosyncrasy against a background of

non-idiosyncrasy: we cannot recognize the individuality of authors until we are first aware of the language habits of their time, i.e. the linguistic features of the various dialects, provinces, and so on, against which background they can display themselves. And this means that any study of individuals requires the prior recognition of the more general linguistic usages contemporaneous with them. (This explains the difficulty of trying to identify the authorship of texts in languages which are no longer spoken – as in the case of the Pauline epistles. Whether the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the epistles are those of one man [= Paul?] or not depends on whether we can first eliminate from the discussion those features common to other letter-writers of the period, and those common to the language as a whole at that time. And in view of the fact that there is so little comparative material extant, it is doubtful whether the problem is solvable.) In one sense, then, linguistic idiosyncrasy is subordinate to the study of shared uses of English; and this is of course the position taken by those who are engaged in teaching the language, where they are in the first instance trying to teach the language 'as a whole', and disregarding those features which belong to individuals. But from the point of view of the study of style, idiosyncrasy – as some of the viewpoints outlined at the beginning of this chapter suggest – becomes of primary importance.

One thing must be made clear at this point. By IDIOSYNCRASY I am not referring to those uncontrolled, and normally uncontrollable features of our spoken or written utterance which are due entirely to our physical state and which will always be present in everything we speak or write. In everything we say, there will always be an idiosyncratic voice-quality, a background vocal effect which identifies us as individuals, and this we do not normally change (unless we are professional actors or mimics, of course). The analogue to voice quality in the written medium is our personal handwriting. Similarly, if we speak with a particular kind of speech defect, or using some psychopathologically-induced set of recurrent images, these may well be idiosyncratic, but this too is a different sense from that intended by the concept of stylistic idiosyncrasy. In the latter case, I am referring to the linguistic distinctiveness individuals can introduce into their language which is not shared by other members of society (i.e. not a variety) and which is capable of conscious control. The author of the language may choose to put something in or leave something out. The important word here is 'may', as very often, depending on someone's experience of using the language, specific linguistic indices of personality may make their appearance

with apparently no conscious effort on the author's part. We are all familiar with the linguistic idiosyncrasies of certain public figures or of favourite authors; we talk about an author's name being 'stamped indelibly on every page', and so forth. But in principle this is something over which authors have a large measure of control: they can change words, alter their order, add and delete at will. Theirs is the decision which ultimately controls what we see or hear, and which ultimately defines their individuality in the use of language. The linguist's job here is to identify and explain the idiosyncratic effects which authors have introduced into their use of language, to see whether these form any kind of pattern, and to try to demonstrate their purpose in relation to the work as a whole.

It is important to emphasize, once again, that linguists do not have an evaluative role in this matter: theirs is, basically, a descriptive task. They are not studying an author's work to decide whether it is good or bad, representative of this quality or literary tradition or that: its 'place' in literature is not of primary importance to them AS LINGUISTS – though of course this may well have entered into their decision as to which text to analyse in the first place, a decision not made on linguistic grounds. Linguists are primarily concerned with ensuring that all features relevant to the identification of an author's own behaviour are understood. If some features are omitted through ignorance, they would argue, then there is a very real danger of relevant information for the overall qualitative assessment of the author by the critic being overlooked. The reason why STYLISTICS, the linguistic study of what is considered to be 'style', has become so popular over recent years, it would seem, is precisely that, using the traditional methods of language analysis and literary criticism, so much of importance for this basic assessment DOES get overlooked. Students of literature, or of any use of English, frequently begin their analysis of a text in a highly impressionistic way, relying on their innate sensitivity to produce the results they seek. But sensitive response alone is – apart from very rare cases – an inadequate basis for reaching a clear understanding of the message which is being communicated. Most people do not have the ability to approach the study of the language of a text in any systematic, objective kind of way. The gifted few, it is true, may be able to sum up the relevance of a poem for them without entering into any systematic procedure of analysis, but for the majority, the initial aesthetic response needs to be supplemented by some technique which will help to clarify the meaning of a text. Stylistics, then, hopes to provide just such a

technique of comprehensive analysis, so that, once it has been mastered, students of language may find it easier to appreciate the complexity of language use.

This now brings me to the final aspect of stylistics which I want to discuss here, namely, What ARE the techniques whereby the 'style' of a text can be analysed? The kinds of language variation which may be found in any piece of language, we must remember, reduce to three basic types: there are the features I have called DIALECTAL (regional, class, historical) which partition the English language in terms of one set of dimensions; cutting across these, there is a second set of dimensions, relating to specific factors in SOCIAL SITUATIONS, such as occupation, relative status, and purpose; and thirdly, there is the possibility of IDIOSYNCRATIC variation, which allows for the modification of the group norms by individual users. It needs a fairly sophisticated stylistic theory to be able to account for every factor; but from the point of view of specifying a procedure for analysis, ALL these dimensions of language variation can be studied in precisely the same way, using any of a number of possible techniques suggested by General Linguistics. Exactly which technique we use will of course be the outcome of our particular training and predilections, and of the specific theory of language structure we may adhere to. These days, there is a great deal of controversy as to which of the many linguistic theories available provides the best basis for the analysis of any given piece of language, but the existence of certain features, or LEVELS of language structure, seems to be generally recognized; consequently it is probably easiest to illustrate the kind of preconception a linguist might bring to bear in studying a text from the stylistic point of view by outlining what is involved in these levels. The most useful levels of structure to recognize for stylistic purposes have already been discussed in the earlier part of this book: phonetics, phonology, grammar, and vocabulary. (The concepts of phonetics and phonology are primarily reserved for the study of speech: for the study of a written text, the analogous levels could be referred to as GRAPHETICS and GRAPHOLOGY respectively.) I would argue that the distinctiveness of ANY text can be broken down in terms of these levels: whatever distinctive stylistic feature we may encounter in English, it can be described as operating at one or some combination of these levels.

To obtain a clearer picture of what is involved, I shall illustrate the kind of distinctiveness which might occur at each level, taking my examples primarily from literary texts. At the PHONETIC level would

be studied any general features of sound which help to characterize a text, such as when a particular voice quality (or set of qualities) is associated with a particular use of language (as in much religious and legal professional speech). The 'clerical' voice is a well-recognized phenomenon, and this principally refers to a quite different 'set' of the vocal organs from that normally used by the clergyman in everyday conversation. Also under phonetics, one would consider those aspects of speech which would normally be referred to under the heading of SOUND SYMBOLISM – a hypothesized capacity of sounds to intrinsically reflect objects, events, and so on, in real life. This view may be illustrated by people who claim that there is something in the nature of an [i:] sound, for instance, which makes it necessarily relate to smallness in size, or whiteness, or something else; or that onomatopoeic words – such as *splash* or *cuckoo* – could have no other shape because they contain the sounds of real life ('biscuits are so called because of the sound they make when you break them'). These arguments have been generally shown to be unfounded. Even such clearly onomatopoeic words as *splash* vary in their form from one language to the next, showing evidence of non-naturalistic influence; and there are always counter-examples to any generalization we might care to make about the 'inherent meaning' of sounds such as [i:]. But it is nonetheless the case that various uses of language (poetry being the clearest example) do try to make use of speech sounds in as evocative a way as possible. If poets consider a particular sound to have a powerful atmosphere-creating potential, then they may well make use of it (i.e. words containing it) more frequently than usual. Of course we have to remember that in general we can only interpret sounds in a given way once we know the theme being expressed by the words: [s] sounds in a poem about a swan may well reflect the noise of the water, but in a poem about evil might equally appropriately be intended to conjure up the noise of serpents, and the like – in other words, there is no 'general meaning' for the [s] sound in language, or even in English. But having said this, we may still plot the way the poet manipulates specific sounds, seen as individual, atmosphere-setting sonic effects, to reinforce a particular theme, and this would be studied at the phonetic level of analysis. In the written medium, we would be referring on similar grounds to such matters as the general size and shape of the type being used (as in the distinctiveness of posters, newspapers), and the lay-out of a text on a page (as when Herbert writes a poem about an altar in the shape of an altar). The PHONETIC and GRAPHETIC levels of analysis, then, to

a certain extent overlap with non-linguistic considerations (e.g. matters of colouring), but the point is that from the stylistic point of view, even such non-linguistic matters as choice of colour might have a contribution to make to the definition of the distinctiveness of a particular use of language – and thus would have to be allowed for in any stylistic theory.

The PHONOLOGICAL and GRAPHOLOGICAL levels are easier to illustrate as they relate to more familiar matters. There are, broadly speaking, two areas of potential distinctiveness: what I would refer to for speech as the SEGMENTAL and the NON-SEGMENTAL areas. Segmental characteristics of style would cover the use of specific vowels and consonants within a particular language's sound system in combination in a distinctive way, as when we make use of reduplicative effects such as alliteration, assonance, and rhyme in English. It is important to note that these devices have a major structural, as well as aesthetic, function – that is, they are the province of phonology, as opposed to phonetics. Alliteration, for example, may well have an important aesthetic appeal; but from the point of view of its overall function in a poem, it has an equally important – and sometimes a more important – role as an organizing process, linking words more closely than would otherwise be the case. For example, when we read such a line as 'Thron'd in the centre of his thin designs' (from Pope's *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*), the major function of the alliteration is to force the words 'thron'd' and 'thin' together, and thus produce a juxtaposition of the concepts 'mediated' by the words, which in the present context produces an ironic contrast. This kind of thing is presumably one of the factors underlying phrases such as 'fusion and meaning', or when we talk about a poet's 'intensifying' meaning. And similar illustrations could be found for the other reduplicative segmental processes. In passing, we should note that it is difficult to generalize about phonological distinctiveness for more than one language. Such matters as alliteration and rhyme are essentially deviations from the normal ways of distributing consonant and other phonemes in English. That is why these effects are so noticeable: they are not normally encountered in our contact with English. In a language where initial reduplication of phonemes WAS normal, however – where prefixes were the routine way of indicating cases, for instance – then much less effect would be gained by alliteration, and we could anticipate that other phonological features than this would be used to produce dramatic and other effects. Similarly, in a language like Latin, where – because of the inflectional endings – it is

difficult NOT to rhyme to some extent, we do not find rhyme being used as a literary device with anything like the same frequency as in English.

The other aspect of phonology is the non-segmental; that is, the features of intonation, rhythm, speed, loudness of articulation, and other vocal effects we introduce into speech in order to communicate attitudes, emphasis, and so on. Spoken English is highly distinctive from this point of view. Taking intonation patterns alone, there would be good grounds for distinguishing between most varieties of spoken English currently in use. There is the characteristically wide range of pitch movement in the public-speaker as opposed to the narrower range in everyday conversation; the 'chanting' effect of the sermon; the restrained, regular movement of the news-reader; and so on. And when we consider features other than pitch, our classification can become very precise: compare the varying speed and loudness of the sports commentator with the measured speed, loudness and pause of the professional reader; the many vocal effects (such as increasing and decreasing the tension of the muscles of the vocal organs for stretches of utterance, which produces a tense, 'metallic' effect and a lax effect respectively) which are introduced into the use of English for television advertising; or the primary role of rhythmic variations in establishing the linguistic basis of poetry. It should be clear from these examples that a great deal of our awareness of stylistic distinctiveness in speech derives from the perception of 'prosodic features' of this kind. When we vaguely hear speech in the distance and say 'That sounds like . . .', we are generally basing our judgement on the dominant prosodic variations we can hear.

The analogous features to phonology in the writing-system of a language can be roughly summarized as the spelling and punctuation of that language. I say 'roughly', because a great deal more is covered by graphology than is traditionally understood by these labels, e.g. the difference between upper and lower case symbols is of systematic importance in English (and not just a matter of aesthetic appeal): it can be used distinctively, as when we write something out in capitals to achieve extra prominence, or when we introduce a graphological change in order to indicate a change in context (without actually having to say so), as when Eliot writes

> I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,
> HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
> Now Albert's coming back . . . (*The Waste Land*)

In English, variations in spelling for special effects are uncommon, though we do find archaic spellings introduced into poetry, or notices printed in an old-fashioned way. An example of this, again from Eliot (*East Coker*), is a good example of the impact of the visual medium which could not possibly be translated into spoken form:

> And see them dancing around the bonfire
> The association of man and woman
> In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie –
> A dignified and commodious sacrament.
> Two and two, necessarye coniunction,
> Holding eche other by the hand or the arm
> Whiche betokeneth concorde.

More commonly in English, we find variations in punctuation, even to the extent of occasionally omitting this altogether (as in the final pages of Joyce's *Ulysses*, for example).

Vocabulary, a language user's 'choice of words', or DICTION, as it is sometimes called, is presumably so familiar an aspect of a person's style that it does not need detailed illustration here. At this level, stylistics tries to determine the extent to which certain words, combinations of words, and types of word are part of the distinctiveness of a use of language. All varieties of English make use of a restricted kind of vocabulary, e.g. the learned, technical vocabulary of scientific English, the loosely colloquial vocabulary of informal conversation, the formal, precise vocabulary of legal documents, the archaic vocabulary of much of religious English, and so on. Sometimes a variety can be identified merely on the basis of certain items of vocabulary, as in the use of such words as *heretofore*, which is used only in legal English or attempts to simulate it. More often than this, however, a style is lexically distinctive due to certain words being used more, or less, frequently than in other varieties or individuals – authors may be said to have their 'favourite' words, for instance. Or there may be a particular distribution and proportion of various categories of word in a text, e.g. the highly distinctive mixture of technical, slang, formal and informal vocabulary in sports commentary, or the parallel use of technical terms and non-technical glosses in many kinds of lecturing. Again, an individual may produce stylistic effects by coining new words (e.g. *theirhisnothis*, Joyce) or by putting unexpected words in a standardized context, as in Thomas's *a grief ago* (where the expectation of a noun of time imbues the notion of grief with temporal associations) and similar examples. The choice of a specific word is

one aspect of style; the placing of that word in a specific context is another, quite different aspect.

In studying vocabulary, we are of course studying meaning to a certain extent, but meaning is not restricted to single words or small combinations of words. Of relevance for stylistic study is the way in which the overall meaning of a use of language is organized, and it is this more general study of meaning which takes place at what is often referred to as the level of DISCOURSE. For example, when we talk about the 'theme' of a poem or novel, or discuss the 'progression' of ideas in a play or an income tax form, we are referring to the most general patterns of meaning that we have been able to discern in a text, and there is a great deal of stylistic significance to be said here, if this is done systematically. The discourse organization of a lecture, for example, with its steady development interspersed by passages of recapitulation and anticipatory summary (e.g. 'there are three things I'd like to say about this . . .') is quite different from the regular, alternating flow of descriptive narrative and background comment which characterizes a sports commentary, and this is different again from the near-random progression of ideas in conversation. I take my examples here from the less familiar (spoken) varieties: in the written medium, the concept of the paragraph, which is a semantic unit (cf. the notion of 'topic sentence', and so on), has long been with us, as have such visualist devices as sub-headings, spacing variations, and diagrams, which make the movement of thought relatively unambiguous and easy to perceive.

Finally, there is the grammatical level of analysis, which is probably the most important component of any stylistic description. There is invariably more to be said about the grammar of a text than about any other level, and in order to make a successful study here it is essential to have fairly clear ideas about the general nature of English grammar, as suggested by some grammatical theory. It is impossible even to outline what would be involved in a complete grammatical description of a text here: some further reading on this question is given in the Bibliography on p 349. But if we consider merely the kind of variations which occur at ONE point in English grammar, it might be possible to get an impression of the overall complexity involved, and so not underestimate the scope of grammatical analysis. The TYPE OF SENTENCE one may find in a text is often a reasonably unambiguous diagnostic indication of its provenance. There is nothing like the long complex sentences of legal documentation elsewhere in English. The language of instructions

structions has a very restricted range of sentence structures at its disposal (high frequency of imperatives and imperative-like elements, absence of questions). Newspaper reporting generally makes use of relatively short, uncomplicated sentences. Newsreading (and most other forms of radio narrative) never uses anything other than statements. In scientific English, equations and formulae can replace elements of sentence structure and sometimes whole sentences. In commentary, conversation and advertising, there is a very frequent and varied use of MINOR sentences (i.e. structures which function as sentences, but which do not have the subject-predicate structure characteristic of the majority of English sentences – as in *hello, sorry,* and so on). The traditional distinction between SIMPLE, COMPOUND, COMPLEX and MIXED sentence types is relevant for categorizing the kinds of distinctiveness we find in texts, and these categories can be further subdivided – the number and type of subordinate clauses, for example, varies considerably from variety to variety as would be clearly shown by a comparison of political public speaking (where they are very frequent, tending to pile up on each other in rhetorical climaxes) with radio news broadcasting (in the latter, subordinate clauses are common, but their distribution is more sporadic, and they rarely are used in anything approaching a 'cumulative' way). In literature, changes in the direction of the plot, or the theme, can be indicated by altering the kind of sentences generally being used; and this device is of course extremely common as one index (often the most noticeable) of character – Dickens, for example, regularly gives his characters a predictable linguistic basis, and sentence structure usually has an important distinctive role to play in this. Again, the absence of clear sentence boundaries may be a major way of communicating a particular effect, as with certain stream-of-consciousness techniques. And there is a great deal else which can be manipulated to make sentences work in a distinctive way (e.g. the devices that may be introduced in order to LINK sentences to each other, such as cross-referencing, repetitions of words, the use of adverbs like *however* and conjunctions).

This has been a very brief outline of a possible method of discovering some principle(s) of organization in the mass of linguisitc features which constitute the distinctiveness of a use of English. It should be clear that ALL levels of analysis enter into this distinctiveness, though some (the grammatical and lexical in particular) have a more dominant role on most occasions. The concept of 'style' which emerges from this approach, when seen within the

perspective of language varieties as presented earlier, is thus very much a cumulative, developing, dynamic one: it is essentially a descriptive convenience which summarizes our awareness at any given moment of the controllable linguistic features that distinguish one use of English from any other. The specification of these uses is in terms of the dimensions of variation outlined in the first half of this chapter: the features are identified and inter-related in terms of the levels of analysis outlined in the second half. It is in such attempts to provide a relatively objective way of talking about and analysing language variation systematically, precisely, and comprehensively, that linguistics hopes to be able to make a permanent contribution to the study of English style.